

**NOAA/Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary
&
Mass Audubon
Present
The Stellwagen Sanctuary Seabird Stewards Program (S4)**

Application Period Open Now for Experienced Birders

If you are an experienced birder who can identify migratory seabirds, are comfortable on the open water and can follow basic protocol, then we have an amazing opportunity for you. If you are not a bird ID expert, but can record data on a vessel, please read on as well.

Program Summary

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, in collaboration with Mass Audubon, is expanding their study of seabirds in the sanctuary. Our goals are threefold: to systematically collect baseline data on seabirds within sanctuary boundaries to compare populations over time; to educate the public about seabirds and connect residents with their sanctuary; and to train a group of observers to join our scientists in this groundbreaking project. The resulting data will be used to compare relative abundance of seabirds over time--to help us understand populations within the sanctuary and their possible impacts on local ecosystems and as a barometer for other changes in the environment.

Volunteer Stewards accepted into the Stellwagen Sanctuary Seabird Stewards Program will have the rare chance to join sanctuary and Mass Audubon staff at sea as part of a project with a professional research team. Stewards will be trained to count birds on the Stellwagen Bank sanctuary *Research Vessel Auk* and on commercial whale watch boats.

- The *Auk* will run full-day cruises at least 5 times per year, including a Christmas Bird Count, and will require at least six trained volunteers per trip.
- Six to ten volunteers per week will have the opportunity to be bird observers on whale watch vessels during the season. Trips run approximately four hours and leave from several ports.

Criteria for Volunteer Selection: A successful candidate will be able to

- **Observer Role:** Identify seabirds and other birds with high degree of accuracy (protocol training will be provided, but prior birding experience is necessary).
- **Recorder Role:** All observers will also become recorders. Volunteers who are not bird ID experts can help by recording the observers' data. See requirements below.
- Travel comfortably on open water and in a variety of weather conditions.
- Stand on deck for prolonged periods of time.
- Follow basic protocol completely and use basic equipment, such as a GPS unit.
- Report data/communicate in a timely fashion via phone and email.
- Attend at least one training session.
- Offer to participate for a block of time—at least three whale watch cruises. Those most experienced and consistent will be considered first for *Auk* cruises.
- Have reasonable flexibility for scheduling (changes in cruise schedules occur due to weather).

If the program seems to match for your skills, interests and availability, please complete a volunteer application at <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/involved/volunteers.html>, and send to Anne-Marie Runfola, Volunteer Program Coordinator, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. If you have questions, contact Anne-Marie at anne-marie.runfola@noaa.gov, or 781-545-8026 x240.

Watch S4 Videos on the SBNMS YouTube Channel, Seabird Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SBNMS/playlists>

Stellwagen Sanctuary Seabird Stewards: Program Background

Just off the coast of Massachusetts, between Cape Ann and Cape Cod, lies a wild area teeming with life and rich in history. Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary was designated as a marine protected area in 1992 for a multitude of reasons, including its high natural productivity and species diversity, as well as its long history of human use. The 842-square mile sanctuary supports 575 known species, including 53 species of seabirds, and the list is largely incomplete. More information on the Stellwagen Bank sanctuary:

<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/welcome.html> Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Final Management Plan: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/management/fmp/fmp2010.html> State of seabirds on pp. 90-97.

The Sanctuary and Its Seabirds

Shearwaters, storm-petrels, gannets, phalaropes, gulls, terns, jaegers, alcids (e.g., auks), as well as various sea duck species dominate the list of avian species supported by the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. The Wilson's storm-petrel, a regular visitor, is thought by some ornithologists to be the most abundant bird in the world, with a global population in the hundreds of millions. The shallow banks and shelves of the Gulf of Main region, including Stellwagen Bank, have long been known to support large numbers of seabirds. Mass Audubon has designated Stellwagen Bank an Important Bird Area (IBA). An IBA is a site that provides essential habitat to one or more species of breeding, wintering or migrating birds, and which supports high-priority species, large concentrations of birds, exceptional bird habitat, and/or has substantial research or educational value. Mass Audubon IBA program: http://www.massaudubon.org/Birds_and_Birding/IBAs/

Despite the variety and numbers, our knowledge of seabirds' lives is fragmentary, at best. Until recently, much of what we know about them has been gathered from their behavior on their breeding grounds. Stellwagen Bank affords a unique opportunity to study seabirds where they spend most of their time, at sea.

Areas with high seabird abundance and richness, such as Stellwagen Bank, are often considered of special interest in marine resource management strategies. Determining which areas of open ocean are most important to seabirds requires, at the very least, quantitative information on the spatial and temporal distribution of seabird species.

Seabirds are an important resource in the sanctuary in that they coexist with, and depend upon, a variety of other marine organisms. Their flight lines have been used for centuries by sailors looking for land and by fisherman studying fish stocks. Scientists now use them as barometers for changes in the environment—for food abundance, the natural cyclic changes within the habitat, and the health of the marine ecosystem.

Staff and volunteers of Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary conduct an annual National Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) with Mass Audubon each year, following a scientific protocol to track bird populations and behavior for a day. However, in order to truly understand these birds, we need to track them more often at home at sea. Mass Audubon has advised that, in addition to the CBC, we move toward at least five cruises per year on the Auk, plus regular trips on vessels of opportunity. Our valued volunteers can help us achieve this goal and help us communicate the status and importance of seabirds to the public.

Program Goals

Research

- Collect systematic baseline data on seabird populations at sea within the sanctuary boundaries through additional counting trips on the *Auk* and commercial whale watch boats.

Education

- Educate the public about seabirds and their importance in the sanctuary.
- Develop more connections between the community and the sanctuary and more support for the sanctuary program by involving partner organizations such as Mass Audubon and local volunteers in the research and subsequent education and outreach efforts.

Citizen Science

- Train a group of volunteers as marine observers, developing their skills and, potentially, job opportunities.